

Committee of the Whole

Council Chairman Kwame R. Brown, Chairperson

Ceremonial Street Designations Hearing

B19-0695, THE “HILDA H.M. MASON WAY DESIGNATION ACT OF 2012”

B19-0644, THE “AUNT BETTY WAY DESIGNATION ACT OF 2012”

B19-0651, THE “WHERE LINCOLN’S LEGACY LIVES DESIGNATION

ACT OF 2012”

B19-0601, THE “ADOLF CLUSS COURT ALLEY DESIGNATION ACT OF 2011”

Testimony of Terese Lowery, Director

Office on Women’s Policy

March 22, 2012

B19-0695 – The Hilda H.M. Mason Way Designation Act of 2012 (Ward 4)

B19-0644 – The Aunt Betty Way Designation Act of 2012 (Ward 4)

B19-0651 – The ‘Where Lincoln’s Legacy Lives’ Designation Act of 2012 (Ward 2)

B19-0601 – The Adolf Cluss Court Alley Designation Act of 2012 (Ward 6)

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, members of the DC Council and Council staff. My name is Terese Lowery and I am the Director of the Mayor’s Office on Women’s Policy and the Executive Director of the District of Columbia Commission for Women, and it my pleasure to testify on the Executive’s support for these four pieces of legislation.

All month long, the Gray Administration has worked to celebrate March as Women’s History Month – not with simple events that overgeneralize the historical role of women in our society, but with meaningful, intentional and targeted celebrations of the true contributions women have made to the District since its very beginning.

Two pieces of legislation before this Council today allow us to do just that – to highlight the significant contributions made by two phenomenal women in Washington’s history, despite the tremendous odds of gender bias, inequality and discrimination.

The two women honored here today are Hilda Mason – longtime political and human rights activist, educator, District Councilmember and self-proclaimed “Grandmother to the world” and Elizabeth “Aunt Betty” Thomas – landowner, selfless volunteer and caregiver to troops in the District during the Civil War.

We’ve heard excellent testimony today from a number of District residents on how the former Councilmember Hilda Mason undoubtedly deserves the honor of Bill 19-695: The Hilda H.M. Mason Way Designation Act of 2012, including her daughter Carolyn, with whom this Administration has worked closely over the last few weeks in preparing for this legislation, so I will keep my testimony on this bill brief, and simply say that Hilda Howland Minnis Mason was an exceptional woman who overcame a legacy of slavery and the Jim Crow-authorized oppression of African Americans, to achieve political prominence for her significant contributions to the District of Columbia as an educator, a civil rights activist, long-time District Councilmember and leader of the DC Statehood Party.

Born in 1916, in a small town at the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia, Mrs. Mason came to the District in the early 1950’s as a young teacher determined to make a difference. She taught

in the District's segregated school system, always insisting upon high academic standards, and often compensating for the lack of resources in her classroom by purchasing special supplies and equipment and supporting field trips out of her own pocket.

In 1971, Mrs. Mason was elected to the District's Board of Education where she worked to increase access to early childhood education, reduce class sizes and bring parity in resources across the school system.

She became increasingly active in civic affairs and the struggle for voting rights in the District – joining the DC Statehood Party and ultimately, being appointed to complete the term of Councilmember Julius Hobson after his untimely death. She then beat out seven other candidates for his seat in the regular election, and was re-elected an impressive four times before leaving the Council in 1998.

During her time on the Council – a time when women rarely held elected office – Mrs. Mason, together with her devoted husband Charles, was steadfast in her dedication to a host of social issues, including high quality education, affordable housing, transportation, a living wage and equal access to opportunities for all District residents to reach their full potential.

Mrs. Mason is perhaps best known for her efforts in education, and played a key role in establishing the University of the District of Columbia and its David A. Clarke School of Law. The University's Law Library is named in honor of Hilda and Charles Mason.

For her significant personal and professional accomplishments, and her commitment to the District of Columbia, the Executive wholeheartedly supports Bill 19-695: The Hilda H.M. Mason Way Designation Act of 2012, which would designate the 1400 block of Roxana Road, NW where Mrs. Mason lived for many years.

The second bill before you today honors Elizabeth Proctor "Aunt Betty" Thomas, a native Washingtonian who owned a home on a hilltop and nearly eleven acres of land in the District's Brightwood neighborhood. Her home was destroyed when soldiers seized her land and used the hilltop to build Fort Stevens during the Civil War. Despite this loss, Aunt Betty still served as a patriot – cooking and caring for soldiers throughout the war. She never received due compensation for her home but nonetheless, continued to serve the Brightwood community and ultimately established the Elizabeth Thomas Citizens Association.

The Executive supports Bill 19-644: The Aunt Betty Way Designation Act of 2012, which would designate Quackenbos Street between 13th Street and Georgia Avenue, NW.

The Executive also supports Bill 19-601: the “Adolf Cluss Court Alley Designation Act of 2012,” introduced by Councilmember Wells. It is our understanding that several homes have been built over the last two years adjacent to the alley, which needs to be designated with a name in order for these residents to have a recorded home address. We understand that the neighbors have worked together with their Advisory Neighborhood Commission to designate the alley in honor of Adolf Cluss, the architect of the nearby historic Eastern Market.

And finally, the Gray Administration supports Bill 19-651: the “Where Lincoln’s Legacy Lives Designation Act of 2012,” introduced by Councilmember Evans. This bill would designate the 500 block of 10th Street NW, where Ford’s Theater is housed, in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s presidency and the recent opening of the Ford’s Theater Education and Leadership Center across the street from the theater.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Council for your time and consideration in extending this opportunity to testify before you today.